

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**October 20, 2008****Contact:** Kate Swan Malin +852 2978 9966 kmalin@christies.com

**ZENG FANZHI'S
MAO I: FROM THE MASSES, TO THE MASSES
TO HIGHLIGHT CHRISTIE'S
*ASIAN CONTEMPORARY ART EVENING SALE***



Hong Kong – Christie's will offer **Zeng Fanzhi's *Mao I: From the Masses, To The Masses*** at the *Asian Contemporary Art Evening Sale* on November 30th at the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre. This pioneering work from the artist is expected to be among the most sought-after offered this season.

Mao I: From the Masses, To The Masses

In *Mao I: From the Masses, To The Masses* (estimate on request) Zeng Fanzhi channels the visual culture of the Communist period, while quietly reworking it based on his own psychological perceptions; it is in this subtle shift away from the programmatic and towards the personal that ushered in the historical emergence of the Chinese contemporary avant-garde. *Mao I* is an early work that pre-dates the artist's famed *Mask Series*, and here one can begin to see the techniques that would later become Zeng's trademarks – most noticeably using the hands as a means for further exploring a character's hidden emotions.

The subtitle of the painting, *From the Masses, To the Masses*, was a core tenet of Chinese political thought promoted by Mao himself, and every aspect of the composition highlights the ideals embodied in the phrase: to be among the masses, to learn from them, in order to lead them - an endless loop of reciprocity and collective self-improvement meant to guide the country to a utopian future. Mao Zedong, appearing at the centre of the canvas, is flanked on either side by Zhou Enlai

and Liu Shaoqi, and the together they are leading a seemingly infinite procession of fellow revolutionaries, as evidenced by the dense display of revolutionary flags that fill the horizon. The three main figures, and indeed most of the figures in the composition, look towards the horizon. Taken as a whole, they represent a collective, forward-moving surge of humanity; a celebratory mood dominates, as all the figures applaud and cheer.

The composition and subject matter of the painting are ambitious and evoke the mass-produced images from the early years of the 1960s into the Cultural Revolution. *Mao I* is dominated by a luxurious red, typical of many of Zeng's early canvases but notably different in its usage here. Red was of course the colour of the Revolution, and in accordance with Chinese cultural traditions, the colour also stands as a symbol of prosperity and joy. Zeng's own artistic technique plays a significant role in deepening the emotional content of the image and distinguishing it from the more polished images this work invokes. While in later works, Zeng might describe facial features hidden by a mask, obfuscating the individual's real features, here the flesh is in deeply red tones evoking raw meat, further linking the figures into one collective group.

The tendency seen in Zeng's works towards exaggerating the human figure is subtle in this work, deepening the mood of the canvas. The eyes are only slightly enlarged, emphasizing the crowd's zealous fervour. All of the figures' hands are enlarged even further, a tactic employed by the artist to reveal psychological qualities not otherwise revealed by facial expressions. Where in later works, the posture of the hands may reveal *contradictory* emotions, here they only serve to further *unite* the figures in their shared goals with their generous and humble gestures accepting applause and returning it, fully embodying the sentiments of the title.

Painted on a grand, larger-than-life scale of the history paintings that Zeng and his contemporaries grew up with and which Zeng himself no doubt would have been trained in, the pageantry of the scene is reminiscent not only of public spectacles of the Communist Party but also the historical paintings of the European tradition. Zeng's study of German and European Expressionism was influential in his use of caricature as a strategy to reveal essential human characteristics that exist beneath superficial surfaces.

The diverse cultural appeal of Zeng's art stems from his honesty, fragility and beauty in portraying raw emotions and in expressing his thoughts upon a universally-shared trait: our recurrent desire to aspire to goals beyond our inherent limits and to appear better than we are.

Auctions:

Asian Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Asian Contemporary Art Day Sale

Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre

November 30, 7:00 pm

December 1, 1:30 pm

****High-resolution image of this work can be downloaded here:**

<http://cshk.myftp.org/2008/%20Christie's%20Hong%20Kong%20Fall%20Auctions/Asian%20Contemporary%20Art/Images/Evening%20Sale/ZENG%20FANZHI.jpg>

Notes to Editors:

- **Christie's is the market leader for Asian Contemporary Art** with a global market share of 56% in 2007.
- Christie's landmark sales of *Asian Contemporary Art* in May 2008 were the largest, most valuable sales ever presented in the category, totaling HK\$570,568,750/ US\$73,146,914.
- **Christie's holds the record for Chinese Contemporary Art:** Zeng Fanzhi's *Mask Series 1996 No. 6* which sold for HK\$75.4million/US\$9.7million.
- **Christie's has played a leading role in shaping the scope, scale and range of the market for Asian Contemporary Art: Christie's was the first auction house to offer a stand-alone sale of Asian Contemporary** (Hong Kong, November 2005). Since then Christie's maintained pole position in the market, and in May 2008 was the first auction house to offer an Evening Sale of Asian Contemporary Art.

#

About Christie's

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global art sales in 2007 that totalled £3.1 billion/\$6.3 billion. This marks the highest total in company and in art auction history. For the first half of 2008, art sales totalled £1.8 billion / \$3.5 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dubai, Hong Kong and Zurich. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium